

Excerpt from Draft Historic Resource Study, Channel Islands National Park, by D.S. (Dewey) Livingston. National Park Service, 2006

Santa Rosa Island Air Force Station at Johnson's Lee

The U. S. Air Force activated the 669th Aircraft Control and Warning (ACW) Squadron on May 5, 1950 at Fort MacArthur. The squadron's mission would be to detect, identify and track air traffic in Southern California as a defense against enemy invasion; the detection system would be directly linked to armed air defense stations throughout the area which could respond instantly to any attack or threat. After tests, Air Force officials chose Santa Rosa Island for the operations site, making use of the protected area on the central southern shore called Johnson's Lee.

Negotiations with the Vail Company apparently went smoothly, as a lease resulted fairly quickly. The lease, wherein the Air Force paid an annual rent of \$20,000, included 336.5 acres of land in four parcels denoted as A, B, C and D: Parcel A consisted of 155 acres covered in a long northeast-to-southwest rectangle including the peaks of Soledad Mountain and what would later be called Vail Peak; Parcel B of 131.6 acres covering two knolls in the vicinity of the old Army radar station, later called Navy Hill; Parcel C of 30 acres for the housing and dock area at Johnsons Lee; and Parcel D of 60 acres, a joint use area of the coastline stretching for one mile east of the housing area. The lease also called for construction by the government of a new road about three miles in length.^{1[1]}

Government lease DA-04-353-ENG-2247, dated December 1, 1950 and to expire on or before November 30, 1965, stressed protection of the ranch operations from "animal diseases of any kind and of poisonous and noxious weeds and plants of every kind" and restricted the government in ways to avoid interference in the day-to-day business of the ranch. The lease granted the government exclusive use of Parcels A, B and C and joint use of Parcel D; also joint use of the pier at Bechers Bay and the road between the pier and the Air Force base, and the roadway from Parcel A to B, allowing ranchers access to the Piedragosa roundup; and right-of-way for water, oil, power and telephone lines on or adjacent to the roads, as well as water rights on its parcels. Vail & Vickers granted permission to use the pier at Bechers Bay for almost two years (the government being held liable for any damage and repairs) and to build a pier if practicable at Johnsons Lee. The Air Force had the right to unload heavy equipment and materials at what would be called Officers Beach, and Air Force personnel gained the privilege to swim there. To prevent hoof and mouth disease, the government agreed to adequately dispose of its garbage, and to prohibit importation of "any non-human form of life" or firearms and ammunition other than that needed for security, and provides for a shooting range on Parcel C. Hunting was strictly forbidden, as was any person of school age, in order to avoid school taxes. The lease states that activities on the island are understood to be "for the purposes of conducting observation sites and not for the purposes of fortification or the launching or landing of weapons of war."^{2[2]}

^{1[1]} Drawing Number 294-M-2, Santa Rosa Island, SBMNH #0882; Real Property Disposal Case Files, RG 291, NA(SB). The map is a valuable source for locations of fences, landing strips, roundups, roads and other ranch features as they appeared in 1950.

^{2[2]} Lease Number DA-04-353-ENG-2247, December 1, 1950 (signed September 30, 1952), SBMNH #1778.

The government agreed to restore the premises as long as the owners requested such restoration in writing within 30 days of after notification of termination of the lease. Restoration would involve removal of buildings but not restoration of the contours of the land or removal of roadways, concrete construction, fencing or wells and water storage. The government retained the option to make cash settlement with the owners in lieu of restoration. Signatures on the lease included Clara Vickers Naftzger and Anna Vickers Crawford for the Vickers Company, Ltd., and Vail Trustees Mary Vail Wilkinson, Margaret Vail Wise, D. A. Baughman, Mahlon Vail and Edward N. Vail.^{3[3]}

Construction

The Air Force hired civilian contractors Morrison Knudsen to construct the facility, which would consist of the radar, transmitting and receiving facilities located at the top of what is now referred to as Vail Peak (elevation 1,589 feet), and a cantonment area for personnel near the shore at Johnson's Lee. The cantonment included five two-story barracks for the airmen, a dining hall and NCO mess, training and recreation buildings, offices, warehouses and maintenance facilities, and a dispensary. Among the first structures to be completed was the solid concrete pier with heavy loading apparatus, reportedly built with the help of oil wildcatter Louis Scott who had been working on the island. Engineers constructed a modern paved road between the Johnson's Lee facilities and the communications station on top of the island. Squadron personnel performed a great deal of the work including equipment installation and landscaping; the last quarter of 1951 saw 33 officers and airmen working on the site with four civilians. At this time, the entire squadron consisted of approximately 185 airmen and 18 to 20 officers, most stationed at Fort MacArthur awaiting their move to Santa Rosa Island. Late in 1951 the squadron newsletter spoke of how "many rumors are flying as to when the squadron will complete its move to the P-Site, but as of this date no date has been set."^{4[4]}

The Air Force received transportation support from the Navy, which provided boat transportation between Port Hueneme and the construction site, and continued to do so throughout the life of the base.^{5[5]}

By the end of 1951 most of the construction work had been completed and members of the squadron worked on the island readying the site for occupation by the full detachment. Men planted grasses in the cantonment area to stem erosion and flying dust. Some delays occurred in obtaining materiel for operations, largely technical equipment supplied under contract with RCA, General Electric and Philco; personnel solved some of these problems by borrowing test equipment from other bases. The

^{3[3]} Ibid.

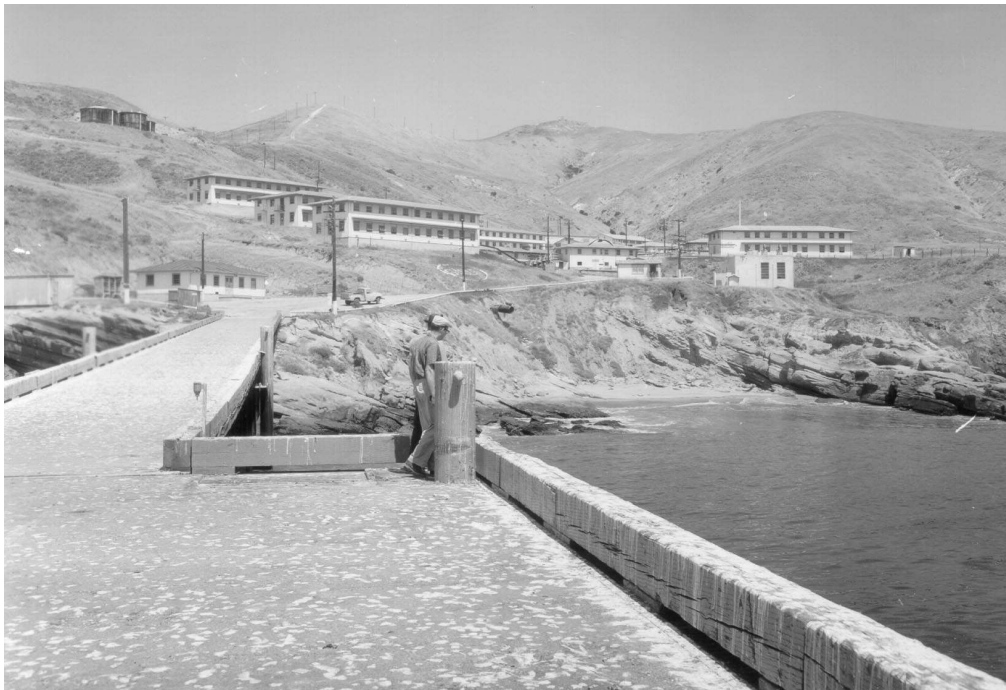
^{4[4]} Squadron History, 1st October '51 to 31 December '51; oral history interview with Diego Cuevas, July 17, 1993 by Will Woolley, SCIF.

^{5[5]} Major General Junius W. Jones, USAF to Rear Admiral Wilder D. Baker, USN, 5 October 1950; W. D. Baker to Major General Junius W. Jones, 13 October 1950, in RG 181, files of District Planning Officer, San Diego, General Correspondence Files 1925-52, Box 28, EG 1940-50, NA(LN).

Air Force flew in supplies as often as possible to save time; during the first year of construction some 7500 pounds of equipment had been flown to the site. Other problems encountered included November wind damage to the AN/CPS-6 radar tower under construction, which resulted in a one-week delay and redesign of the roof



The Air Force radar station was located at the highest elevation on Santa Rosa Island. *Channel Islands National Park*



Air Force base at Johnsons Lee seen from the pier, August 1965. *Channel Islands National Park*

structure, an injury to a civilian employee of Hub City Steel Company who in December fell from a scaffold and suffered internal bleeding, and contamination of the drinking water supply from an unknown source (which was subsequently improved). A Navy boat, unloading cargo, rammed the new concrete pier, damaging both the boat and pier. **According to Al Vail, a plane carrying the construction engineer crashed while attempting to land in a field east of the cantonment, killing the engineer and injuring two others.** In December of 1951 technicians turned on the power for the first time to test equipment, with generally positive results.^{6[6]}

At this time, the Air Force referred to the new station as the “P-Site”, and it was officially designated as Santa Rosa Island Air Force Station P-15. The Navy site nearby would now fall under security authority of the larger Air Force organization, as stated in a squadron bulletin: “It is understood by the Navy that the 669th Commanding Officer will be in charge of the P-Site and that all Navy personnel and civilians connected with the Navy, will be subject to the policies and security regulations prescribed by the Squadron Commander. Close liaisons with the Navy at Point Mugu will eliminate any misunderstandings.”^{7[7]}

As final details were completed in the first six weeks of 1952, Brigadier General Hutchinson conducted a general inspection of the facilities. A group of engineers made a study of soil erosion and its effect on the roads and grounds, an agronomist made a visit, and numerous other inspections occurred. On February 13, 1952, the 669th Squadron made its official move from the temporary “L” site at Fort MacArthur to its permanent “P” site at Santa Rosa Island. One day previously, Major Charles F. Hobart assumed command of the organization; that day he flew to the site for an inspection and gave the go-ahead for the much-anticipated move.^{8[8]}

While squadron personnel reported that they were “in full operation and carrying out our assigned mission,” they encountered many difficulties in fulfilling these duties due to the harsh conditions on the island:

Accomplishment of the squadron’s mission has been most trying at times due to many obstacles affecting the operating efficiency of the squadron. Transportation of personnel to and from places of duty due to poor road conditions and high winds causing damage to power lines and transformers during adverse weather conditions presents the most serious of obstacles.^{9[9]}

Complaints arose about the poor construction of the paved road from Johnson’s Lee to the mountain top installations, as erosion and drainage problems caused much damage to the road during its first year in use. During bad weather, the five-mile trip to the transmitters could take up to an hour. On March 18, a landslide on the lower portion of the road blocked passage between the cantonment and the operations area, causing the stationing of trucks on either side of the slide to transport personnel to their destinations. The size of the boulders blocking the roadway required dynamiting for removal.

^{6[6]} Ibid.

^{7[7]} Ibid.; oral history interview with Al Vail, October 22, 1986 by Marla Daily, SCIF.

^{8[8]} Squadron History, 1st January ‘52 to 31st March ‘52, pp. 1-2.

^{9[9]} Ibid., p. 2.

By contrast, transportation by sea went comparatively smoothly during the first period of operations. The Navy provided a fast PT boat that transported personnel, rations, mail and other items on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The 54-mile trip from Port Hueneme usually took one and a half hours in good conditions, two to three hours in poor weather. A newspaper writer described “these men of the skies huddled together secured to their seats with safety belts, bundled in overcoats and wrapped even more snugly in Mae Wests as they cruised to the island base.” A new building was constructed near the pier to house the liaison officer, whose duties included “close surveillance of incoming and outgoing passengers,” coordination with Navy interests, and supervision of cargo transport to and from the island.^{10[10]}

It took time to bring technical operations up to a high level at the new facility. After the Air Defense Net acceptance at 1100 hours on February 16, the station officially went “on line” with 60 airmen and ten officers working seven days a week, six hours on and twelve hours off. Personnel took about eight days leave per month on the mainland. Eventually the station would be staffed by up to 300 (average 200) men, including about 30 civilians. During the first month tracking efficiency decreased, a problem attributed to new equipment operated by inexperienced personnel. The shortcoming was quickly overcome. Aircraft identification improved, with 99.5% of incoming aircraft being identified within one minute, but tactical intercepts decreased largely due to poor weather conditions and a shortage of fighter aircraft for the drills. The move from San Pedro to the island caused some changes in areas of responsibility and identification procedures. The station, charged with identifying all incoming aircraft to its assigned region, required a new reporting line for the incoming over-water flights. Some faulty installations by contractors had to be repaired, and weather disrupted communications and electrical power on a number of occasions. Less than a month into operations, the 11th Radar Calibration Team inspected the new radar equipment and found that it was “operating at a considerably substandard level.” Fourteen new radar mechanics had been trained and would deal with such problems, guided by three Philco Technical Instructors and one General Electric Field Representative who were permanently assigned to the station. However, the Communications Center and VHF section faced manpower shortages that slowed operations somewhat and added tensions only alleviated by assigning inexperienced personnel to duty. A staffed “Cryptocenter”, charged with decoding international communications, went into operation in March of 1952.^{11[11]}

While the problems of contamination of the water supply were mostly solved, having adequate supplies became an ongoing concern. The well dug by the Air Force proved inadequate for the station’s needs. On March 7, a Navy barge, pumping water to replenish the low island supply, had to abort due to heavy seas at the pier. Four days later the officer in charge ordered a temporary state of emergency that outlawed showers, shaving and use of toilets; a “slit trench” was dug for alleviation of the latter problem. The Air Force met the problem by installing three salt-water conversion units capable of producing 600 gallons of fresh water per hour from seawater. These would have ongoing problems, such as a total breakdown in 1959 that necessitated the transport of two barges containing 400,000 gallons of water for

^{10[10]} Ibid., pp. 2-4; Charles Hillinger, *Charles Hillinger’s Channel Islands* (Santa Barbara: Santa Cruz Island Foundation, 1998), p. 200.

^{11[11]} Squadron History, pp. 9-14.

the station's needs. In December of 1960, a 280,000 gallon barge wrecked on the approach to Johnson's Lee, causing emergency activation of the salt water conversion plant (a newspaper headlined, "200 DRINK CONVERTED BRINE AS BARGE LOST"). By the time the station closed, all water was reportedly imported at great expense.^{12[12]}

The Air Force Station: A Description

The Santa Rosa Island Air Force Station originally occupied two sites on the island, the cantonment or squadron area at Johnson's Lee and the operations area on the summit of Vail Peak; later, apparently in conjunction with the Navy, a microwave communications center was constructed on a nearby hill. All sites were surrounded by barbed wire-topped chain link fences, and connected by a paved road that followed the spine of the ridge near the top then cut down across side hills and across a large gulch to reach the cantonment area. Security forces manned gates at the facilities.

Upon arriving at the station by boat, a visitor would be transported from boat to pier in a secure seven-foot high steel cage attached to a crane. Base vehicles then drove passengers on the pier to the land, passing the liaison building on the left at the foot of the pier, and then winding up a road past a series of barracks and service facilities. At the top of the slope, at an elevation of about 150 feet, stood a complex of maintenance buildings and, even higher, the water storage tanks. Below here the road forked: to the right or east a ranch road which would pass the ill-fated landing strip and Officers Beach towards The Wreck roundup area; to the left the paved road continued west and north a distance of about four miles to the operations area, passing minor cutoff roads to other government facilities, including the South Point Light, the abandoned Army radar site, and the Navy/Air Force communications site.

The Operations area on the flattened summit of Vail Peak was reached after branching left on a fork of the old Standard Oil road (right leads to ranch headquarters at Bechers Bay) then right to the summit. Here stood the radar towers, transmitting and receiving antennas, and the operations buildings where men monitored air traffic.

Operations and Life on the Base

The primary function of this Western Air Defense facility was to monitor incoming air traffic in the southern California area, tracking and identifying all aircraft whether military, commercial or private. Checking each aircraft with their Air Movement Information Section (AMIS), presence of any unidentified craft would activate fighter planes from nearby Air Force or Navy bases. The island location of this base provided a forward alert base that could provide advance information to prevent an enemy

^{12[12]} Ibid., pp. 21-22; *Historical Record of the 669th ACW Squadron for the period ending June 30, 1959*, p. 1; unidentified news clipping dated December 8, 1960, SCIF.

attack by air from the west. A reporter quoted base commander Major Charles E. VanBibber describing their mission: “We detect, identify, intercept, and, if necessary, destroy.”^{13[13]}

^{13[13]} Hillinger, *The Channel Islands*, pp. 75-76.



Personnel and visitors to the Air Force station were transported from boat to dock, and vice versa, in a cage lifted by a derrick. *Los Angeles Times* photo, courtesy of UCLA Special Collections

Los Angeles Times feature reporter Charles Hillinger and photographer Howard Maxwell visited the island in 1956, as the first representatives of the press allowed to tour the secret facility. Hillinger first published his reports in a series of features in the *Times*, then in a book, *The California Islands* (1958). Edited versions have since been published by the Santa Cruz Island Foundation as *Charles Hillinger's Channel Islands* (1998).^{14[14]}

Men worked an eighteen-month tour of duty with three days a month leave, which included transport to and from the island. Hillinger described the trip from Port Hueneme on a 78-foot PT boat "manned by a leathery-faced, wind-blown and salt-sprayed crew of six sailors" that took anywhere from one-and-a-half to three hours depending on weather. On arrival, men were off loaded in a cage lowered and raised to the boat deck by a crane, then transported to their barracks or duty station by van.

Men were assigned duty depending on their training and skills; most were technical, involving monitoring air traffic on large scopes in the operations area, while others performed guard duty and patrol. Civilians took care of most maintenance and repair. All ate at a commissary staffed by civilians.

The cantonment included numerous venues for entertainment and relaxation, according to Hillinger:

Hobby shops, recreational facilities, television (with reception exceptionally good on all the Islands), nightly movies, fishing trips on calm days in four light boats, archery, badminton, baseball and tennis provide activity for lonely hours. The camp library, stocked with donated books, rates high in popularity.^{15[15]}

Hillinger noted that lack of women was the only drawback to many of the men: Vail & Vickers prohibited women and children to take up residence at the base; the lease prohibited "any person of school age, unless such person be an active member of the Armed Forces There are no schools on Santa Rosa Island, and therefore, Owner does not pay any school tax" ^{16[16]} Otherwise, morale was "surprisingly good." The barracks were kept clean and featured a number of "homey touches like curtains and tablecloths." Men formed bands and played music, played pool and ping-pong, but hiking and hunting were outlawed. A minister and priest visited the island once a month for three days to conduct services in a small chapel.

An enlisted medic provided basic medical treatment in a well-equipped clinic; a dentist spent a week per month in an equally well-equipped dental lab. Lulis Cuevas, young daughter of ranch foreman Diego Cuevas, received medical attention from the Air Force doctors, including shots and treatment for the measles.^{17[17]}

Air Force Base and cattle ranch interacted well, according to most sources. Ed and Al Vail visited the station regularly and Air Force men came to the ranch headquarters. The Vails were friendly especially with Col. Jack Blacker, the last commandant of the base. Col. Blacker flew a plane and usually

^{14[14]} Charles Hillinger, *The California Islands* (Los Angeles: Academy Publishers, 1958).

^{15[15]} Hillinger, *The Channel Islands*, pp. 73-78.

^{16[16]} "Land Lease," pp. 13-14.

^{17[17]} Oral history interview with Diego Cuevas, July 26, 1993 by Will Woolley, Tape 7 page 24, SCIF; personal communication with Lulis Cuevas, January 3, 2000.

landed at ranch field, although reportedly once at the deadly field near the base which had claimed lives years before. The facility had a bar that attracted island workers as well as archeologist Phil Orr and his crew.^{18[18]}

Once Ed and Al Vail, after receiving “first class invitations,” dressed in tuxedos and brought the *Vaquero II* around for a formal party with the “big brass”; Phil Orr attended, too. Former ranch foreman Diego Cuevas remembered what he called “the Army camp,” with

. . . everyone running up and down and whistling and singing, and some on their jeeps, some on their pickups, doing something. Have a movie theater, have a playroom, have pool tables, movies, church, doctor’s office, paramedics; and then go back now and nothing but dirt.^{19[19]}

Sometimes the interaction had its problems: cattle chewed on the telephone cables, enlisted men occasionally trespassed or hunted illegally. According to Cuevas, when Hayden Hunt was foreman, he took the officers hunting. “The officers get away with anything with the foreman. All they have to do is take him a case of beer or a bottle of booze and they could do anything they want.” After Hunt left, Diego did not allow hunting. Enforcement of the island hunting rules made Cuevas unpopular with many of the men, but at the motor pool and offices he was well respected for his helpfulness and mechanical knowledge. Cuevas provided fresh meat for base barbecues, and bought things he needed at the base store. The Air Force invited island cowboys to the movies, and to beer parties on the beach; the commanding officer allowed the ranch to take parts and tires from the motor pool, and shared stores; Cuevas recalled receiving a huge four-foot wheel of cheese given as a gift for ranch workers.

Cuevas told of an incident when some enlisted men got drunk and decided to leave the island. They reportedly stole the CO’s jeep, drove to the pier where they stole a skiff which soon swamped; the men made it back to shore where they drove onto the island and wrecked the jeep in the dark, resulting in at least one fatality. Cuevas, true to island form, made a water pump with the salvaged jeep engine.

During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the island base came under temporary alert, instituting increased restrictions on the cowboys’ travel. Air Force personnel put up gates and check points and stationed armed guards various places on roads; Cuevas had to call headquarters to obtain permission to go to China Camp.^{20[20]}

Deactivation and Disposal, 1963-1996

News of the planned deactivation of the Santa Rosa Air Force Station reached the personnel as rumors late in 1962. An Air Force study concluded, after reviewing operations at Santa Rosa Island and investigating potential sites on the mainland, that the station could be moved “without significant sacrifice

^{18[18]} Oral history interview with Al Vail, March 25, 1993 by Carolyn Petry, transcript p. 14 SCIF.

^{19[19]} Oral history interview with Diego Cuevas, October 10, 1993 by Will Woolley, SCIF.

^{20[20]} Oral history interview with Diego Cuevas, July 19, 1993 by Will Woolley, SCIF.

of radar coverage” to a site at Point Conception. The study noted the high “cost of support and operation of the present island site, as compared with the expected cost of support and operation of a site at Point Conception . . . [by moving, the] savings effected through relocation would pay for the construction over a

period of years.” The study outlined the “extremely expensive” activities needed to support operations at the island, detailing how supplies, fuel and water, and personnel had to be transported by Navy launches, electricity had to be generated by diesel power, and contract construction and maintenance costs were at least 50% higher than on the mainland and “frequently, contractors will not even bid on construction projects on the island.” Morale and family problems affected personnel on the island as well. All pointed towards closure of the island facility, and the headquarters agreed with the study’s recommendations.^{21[21]}

Headquarters approved the closing of the base in late 1962, directing the Squadron Commander to commence deactivation procedures with a target closing date of March 31, 1963. *The Islander*, the squadron’s newsletter, published its last edition on March 1, its headline reading, “Santa Rosa Island Bids a Fond Farewell” and reporting of the base closing party complete with “delicious” steak dinners, softball, tug-of-war and relay races.^{22[22]}

The 669th ACW Squadron operated for its last day at Santa Rosa Island on March 31, 1963. The 669th moved to the Lompoc Air Force Station at Point Conception the following day with no interruption in service. The squadron’s Historical Record told of the significance of the station:

A review of the 669th’s accomplishments since its activation into the Air Defense Net on 16 February 1952 shows an impressive record. The unit was awarded the Western Air Defense Force “A” award two years in succession for outstanding performance during Operational Readiness Inspections conducted in 1959 and 1960. The unit compiled a total of 7363 intercepts in 1961 and claimed second place in the Air Force for intercepts conducted by an ACW Squadron. The unit has received correspondence commending the unit and individual sections for superior performance from numerous inspection teams as well receiving excellent evaluations. Recently the unit was commended by Brigadier General Henry C. Newcomber, who was then Commander, Los Angeles ADS, for the unit’s clean sweep of inspections and operational evaluations in 1962. These highlights demonstrate that the mission of the 669th has been accomplished in an outstanding manner and for this the men of the 669th are proud.^{23[23]}

Colonel Frederick J. Nelander, Commander of the Los Angeles ADS, and staff members made the final inspection of the facilities, making “many favorable comments . . . concerning the unit and its facilities.” For phaseout purposes the base became Detachment #2 of the Los Angeles ADS. About 50 personnel remained during the phaseout to assist a Ground Electronics Engineering Agency team from Norton AFB that would remove equipment. During the months previous, efforts had been made to distribute operable equipment, including technical, medical and recreational items and the unit library, to

^{21[21]} Pages of unidentified document provided by staff at USAF Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, pp. 97-98.

^{22[22]} *The Islander*, Vol. I, No. 8, March 1, 1963.

^{23[23]} *Historical Record of the 669th ACW Squadron*, p. 1

other units, reportedly saving thousands of dollars. In anticipation of the removal of the switchboard and phone system, technicians had installed portable field phones in the squadron area.^{24[24]}

The Army Corps of Engineers notified Vail & Vickers of the closure, and in May 1963 mailed a Notice of Cancellation, effective June 30, that terminated the 13-year-old lease that had been set to expire on November 30, 1965. Soon the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company officially abandoned its communications system, including two 10-foot parabolic antenna “dishes” and equipment in a cement block building reportedly located at the summit of Soledad Peak, leaving it for the Vails to make use of. The entire base, however, required a great deal of time and labor to dispose of.^{25[25]}

The General Services Administration accepted the Air Force’s Report of Excess on April 22, 1963 and proceeded to pursue disposal of the site (including a number of surplus Navy buildings in the area), spurred by the Army Corps of Engineers’ concern about the high rental costs on the vacant facility and the fact that funding for rent and custodial services had been programmed through June of 1963. In seeking alternate uses of the facility, the GSA notified the Department of Defense and the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, who in turn contacted the State of California for potential interest as a site for educational or health facilities; neither agency, nor any other federal agencies, held any interest in future use of the site. The GSA noted on its Report of Excess that “although contrary to [the] land owner’s expressed desire it is considered that [the] most practical use of government properties would be development as [a] recreational area.” It was also noted that “the cost of removing the buildings to the mainland is considered to be greater than their value on the mainland,” pointing out the difficulties in transportation and high labor costs. Paper work during this process revealed the acquisition costs of the site to be \$3,206,000 for 78,647 square feet of building space and associated roads and utilities. The Air Force then abandoned the facility, leaving all buildings, utilities and much equipment to Vail & Vickers. At the time of abandonment by the Air Force, the site consisted of at least forty buildings and structures.^{26[26]}

Vail & Vickers took over the facilities at Johnson’s Lee and the mountaintop and soon made use of their bounty. Small buildings could be moved intact. Ranch workers used salvaged materials all over the island for buildings, including the new foreman’s residence and the replacement bunkhouse, and roundup corrals. Cowboys used the guardrail left on the military road as railing at all the roundups, resulting in some of the sturdiest corrals existing in California. The Air Force left the water plant, heating and steam systems, cots, mattresses, lamps and the like; in the motor pool the cowboys found an abandoned compressor, car lift, fuel tanks and pumps. Trespassing fishermen reportedly took a lot of items; one was caught by Russ Vail and Diego Cuevas and disciplined at the ranch.^{27[27]}

^{24[24]} Ibid., pp. 1 and 3.

^{25[25]} Carl M. Neely to The Vickers Company, Ltd. and Vail Company, 29 May 1963; H. S. Hitchcock to Mr. A. L. Vail, July 18, 1963, SBMNH #0884.

^{26[26]} Real Property Disposal Case Files, RG 291, NA(SB); “Buildings, Structures, Utilities and Miscellaneous Facilities,” Schedule A—Supplement to Report of Excess Real Property, NA(SB). See Appendix for complete list of structures.

^{27[27]} Oral history interview with Diego Cuevas, July 19, 1993 by Will Woolley, Tape 4, SCIF; personal communication with park archeologist Don Morris.

Not all of the staggering amount of materials and buildings could be used, and the facilities lay deteriorating for more than 30 years, used as occasional shelter by trespassing boaters, and continually picked over by the ranch crew for odds and ends. The National Park Service developed a document studying the demolition and/or rehabilitation possibilities of the complex in 1985, which recommended retaining a handful of the buildings but removing the rest. Park staff prepared a FONSI in 1986 that covered removal of many buildings, restoration and reconstruction of the pier. At the time, the base had been determined ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places. After a few years of National Park Service use as island headquarters, about 1987 to 1990, the site was abandoned except for one building. In the late 1980s the Army Corps of Engineers removed asbestos and underground storage tanks, and the park service then burned most of the buildings. After completing environmental and historical studies, in 1991 and 1992 the National Park Service buried the remaining foundations of the facility, removed the pier ruins and revegetated the terrain. Only one building of the base remains in place, Building 147, the 2,193 square foot auto maintenance shop, which is now used by park personnel as a remote storage and study base. The asphalt pavement on the road to the mountain remains, but is deteriorating and in some places hazardous.^{28[28]}

^{28[28]} Personal communication with Tim Glass by the author; *Special Study, Environmental Assessment, Demolition, Restoration of Abandoned Military Facilities, Channel Islands, Johnsons Lee, Santa Rosa Island* (Denver: National Park Service, 1985).